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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/PPD

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SUBJECT: PUBLIC AFFAIRS OVERVIEW OF SECSTATE VISIT TO PARIS

¶11. Summary: Three dominant views emerged in the French media from a plethora of reaction to the Secretary's visit to Europe. Coverage of the Secretary's visit to Paris was extensive, and its tenor was quite warm, especially when contrasted with the Iraq-inspired chill in American-French relations. She was portrayed as genuine and charming, placing "Bush in the best possible light" ('Liberation' headline). Following the generally effusive reaction to what was heralded as a change in tone from Washington, some analytical pieces, appearing after commentators had parsed her speech and heard her comments in Brussels in meetings with NATO and EU members, stressed that while there was a "new tone" in relations, substantial policy differences and potential "cold showers" remain, especially regarding Iran, the arms embargo on China and democracy in the Middle East. (Article in 'Depeche du Midi'; Editorial in 'Republicain Lorrain'; Analysis in 'Le Figaro.') Other commentary included introspective calls for Europe to design a complementary and active partnership with the United States in the pursuit of common goals around the globe. End Summary.

THE U.S. AND EUROPE TOGETHER AGAIN

¶12. French national and regional press made much of the fact that the Secretary gave her "much awaited" speech in Paris as a "sign of goodwill" and played "no false note" during the visit. (Analysis in 'La Croix'; Editorial in 'Liberation'). The media's take on her speech was overwhelmingly positive with headlines and articles entitled "Turning the Page" and "Condi Rice Wants to Open a New Era with Europe" (Analysis in 'La Croix'; Article in 'Le Figaro') and commentaries stating: "We are witnessing a new chapter in Franco-American relations" and "The warming of relations appears to be a priority for the second Bush administration" (TF1 Television commentary; Editorial in 'Le Figaro').

HOPEFUL BUT WARY

¶13. Later analytical pieces advocated a wait-and-see attitude. One commentary opined, "She talks the talk, but will she walk the walk?" It asked whether the United States had really "converted to multilateralism and dialogue," or if it was just making a "tactical adjustment" of tone to curry goodwill among Europeans (Editorial in 'Liberation'). Once the Secretary spoke in Brussels and "went on the offensive," "raising issues of dissension such as Iran, Iraq and the embargo against China" (Analysis in 'Le Figaro'), some commentators returned to earlier opinions that saw stark differences in transatlantic reactions regarding these problem areas and concluded that the tone may have changed, but not the substance of American policy. They suggested Europeans "have a choice between supporting U.S. policy or taking their distance, with the risk of a serious transatlantic crisis." (Analysis by F. Heisbourg in 'La Croix'). Another comment regarding the perceived U.S. "re-engagement in the Middle East," negatively described "a triumphant America seeking to graft its conception of culture and democracy wherever it can so as better to dominate economically" (Editorial in 'Republicain Lorrain'). This theme of the U.S. desire to dominate allies and pursue its agenda was echoed by others in the national and regional press who wrote: "American-style partnership has two pillars: the conviction of being right and the knowledge it is all-powerful. The partners have a choice between being obedient or pretending to protest" (Editorial in 'La Croix'). Others chided the Secretary for believing some partners are more equal than others. "The ink wasn't dry on the headlines celebrating the Franco-American "reunion" after two years of strained relations when the heroine of this reconciliation... reminded Europeans that in a partnership of equal rights and duties, the American vision remained more equal in the treatment of the great international issues' (Editorial in 'Nord lair').

AND NOW NEEDED: EUROPE'S RESPONSE

¶14. Still other reflective pieces in recent days, in the prestigious 'Le Monde' and 'Le Figaro' newspapers, offered a third view on the Secretary's message. Rather than insist

on America's desire to pressure Europeans into falling in line, they focused on the need for Europe to decide its policy and pursue action in response to the U.S. challenge of building democracy and containing proliferation. One commentator proffered, "There are no diverging interests of a long-lasting nature"; (both sides) share the same goals and "can complement each other." Another stated, `It is up to Europeans, and perhaps most particularly the French, to more clearly enunciate our vision of the promotion of democracy, to be faithful to our ideals and more capable in the transatlantic framework."

15. Conclusion and Comment: The decision to include a public event that reached across the broad spectrum of French society in the Secretary's itinerary resulted in tremendous media coverage of her speech and overwhelmingly positive reaction to the Secretary as a person. The event -- and its location in France at Sciences Po -- succeeded in assuaging many concerns about Secretary Rice's views of Europe and her ability to relate to Europeans. Although some remained more reserved in their praise with respect to substance and policy and despite some carping about the selection process of audience and student questions, the Secretary largely won over students, opinion leaders, and

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officials with her willingness to enter a debate. In discussion with Embassy staff after the speech, while noting that the Secretary did not mention the European Union's efforts in trying to peacefully negotiate with Iran and expressing surprise that she used the recent Franco-American pressure on Syria to allow free Lebanese elections as an illustration of positive U.S.-French relations, students expressed approval that a greater amount of time and attention would be devoted to Israeli-Palestinian issues. Audience members said they were pleased to discover Dr. Rice's ease and comfort in talking about philosophical issues and shared values. Many expressed real excitement at seeing the U.S., with the Secretary as its public face, trying to reach out and reinvigorate relations through this public event. The Sciences Po event was a public affairs success, which left many Europeans hopeful that they had rediscovered a partnership they feared lost.

Leach